The Blues Scale

I like to teach the blues scale as to how it relates to the pentatonic scale. If you haven't read the section about the pentatonic scale, please do that now as we will be building upon that information.

If you are already familiar with the pentatonic scale, then you are more than half way to having a good understanding of the blues scale and how to use it. With that being said, the blues scale is the pentatonic scale with the addition of one more note. If you are playing the minor blues scale, you will be adding the flatted fifth to the minor pentatonic scale. If you are playing a major blues scale, you will be adding the flatted third to the major pentatonic scale. If you remember from eBooks one and two, the major scale is extremely important to musicians and it's our sole benchmark for analyzing chords and scales. So if we wanted to find the flatted fifth of the A minor pentatonic scale, we would need to play the A major scale to find the fifth note to flatten it. If we wanted to find the flatted third of the C major pentatonic scale, we would need to play the C major scale and find the third note to flatten it. That's why it is called the flatted fifth or flatted third. It's not crucial that you understand how we came up with that, but if you're like me you like to know the "why" about things. You can always look at our diagram that follows this text description and see just how closely the pentatonic and blues scale actually are. Try as you may, you can't play the blues scale without sounding "bluesy". Therefore, it's going to be our scale of choice for this style. The minor blues is a more widely used and accepted sound; however major blues is also acceptable and has its own flair. Since the whole idea of blues music is that which cries and sings, I personally prefer the minor blues sound.

The Blue Note

The blues scale is the pentatonic scale with an added note known as the "blue note" (denoted as "BN" in the following diagrams). As useful as the pentatonic scales are, adding the blue note will seriously "blues up" your playing. The blue note is often used as a passing tone. A passing tone is also known as a "non-chord" tone. Its sound is a little bit more volatile or unstable whereas the rest of the scale is very stable. When teaching the blues to my one-on-one students, I refer to the blues tone as the "hot sauce" that we put in chili. The main ingredients in chili are going to be things like beans and tomatoes, but what is chili without hot sauce or chili sauce? Exactly! It would just taste like beans and tomatoes. However, too much hot sauce and your chili is too hot. Not enough hot sauce and it's going to be boring and bland. Now obviously one's personal taste regarding chili would determine how much hot sauce one desires. In the same way, the blues note can be used to taste, but as a rule is not used as much as the other notes. Also, you will notice that the blue note is in between two stable notes from the pentatonic scale. If you were to play this three notes going up or down, the blue note is very palatable and easy to listen to. If you jump straight to the blue

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note from another note in the scale and resolve it to either the note above or below the blue note it will be a little less stable, but still work. Lastly, if you approach the blue note from any note in the scale other than the one above it or below it, and follow it with any other note other than the note above and below it, it will sound very strange and not very palatable whatsoever. When you're done reading this section, try experimenting with these three examples. It will really help you get a better understanding of the blue note and just how to use it in your playing. With all that being said, music is art and the "rules" of art are meant to be broken. So have fun with it! If you are having a problem adding the blue note, make sure you are not isolating it like the third example.

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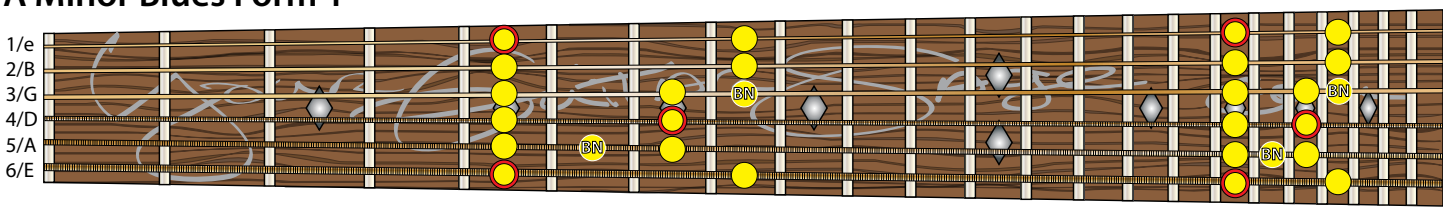
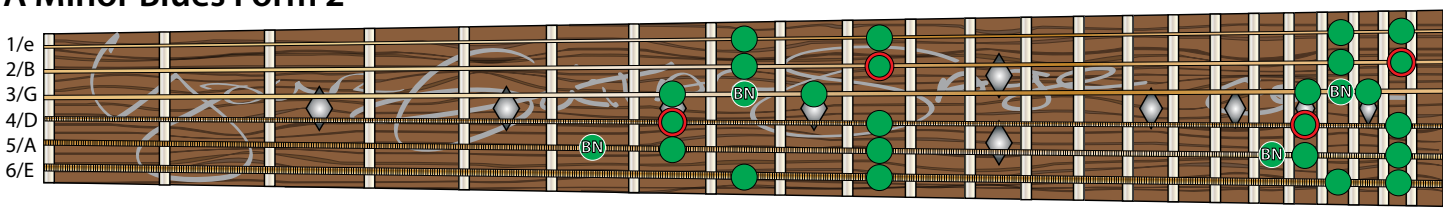
Minor Blues Scale Forms

A Minor Blues Form 1



A Minor Blues Form 2



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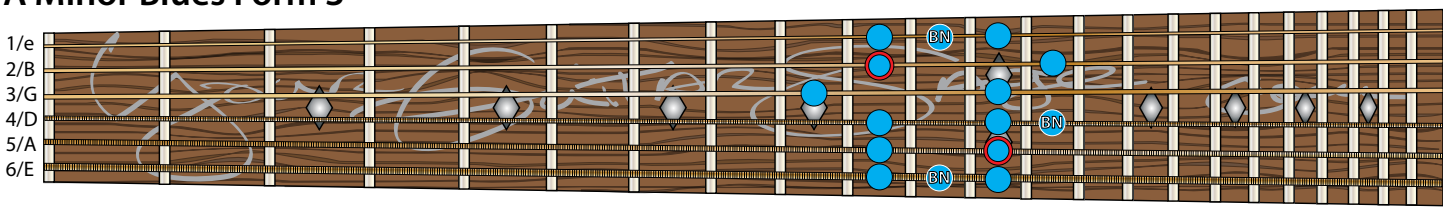

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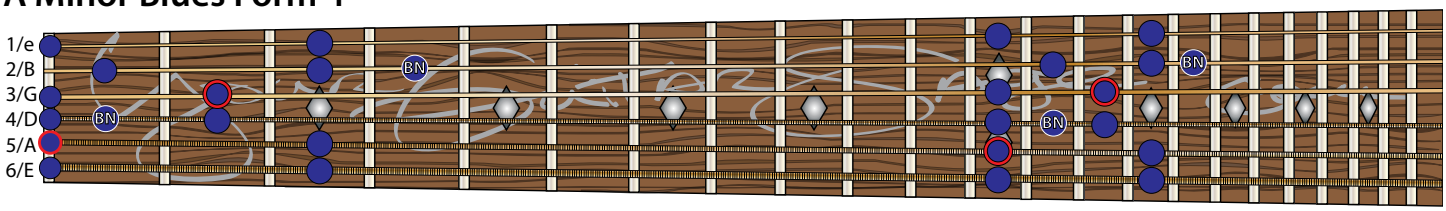

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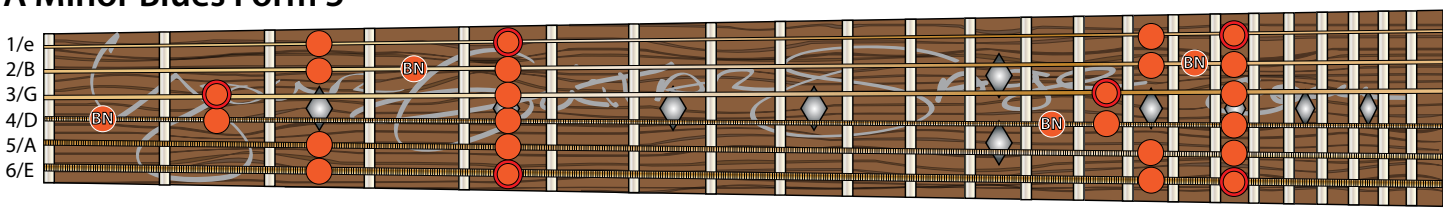
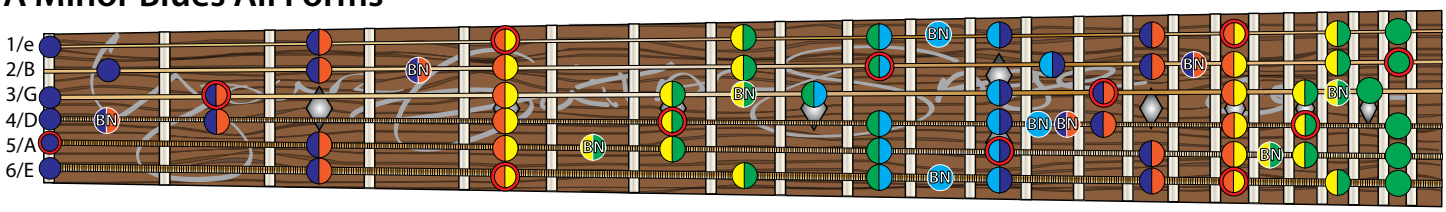


A Minor Blues All Forms



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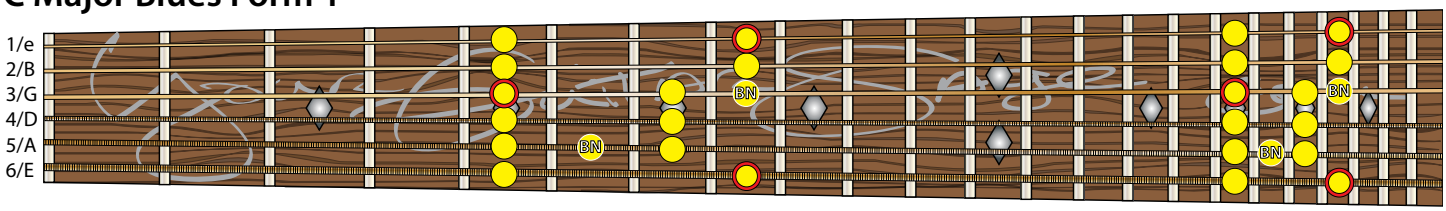
Major Blues Scale Forms

C Major Blues Form 1



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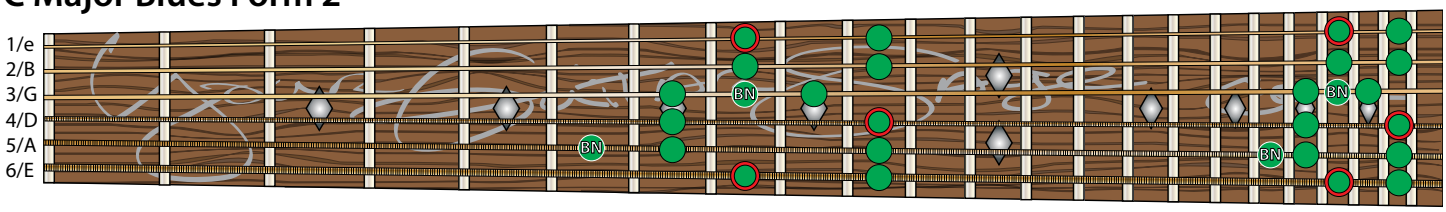

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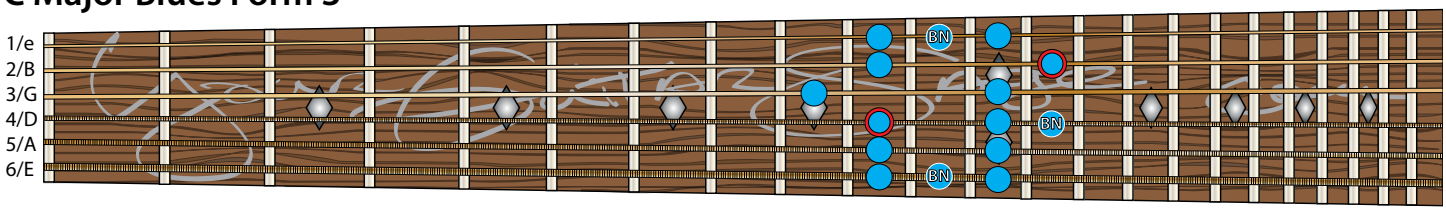

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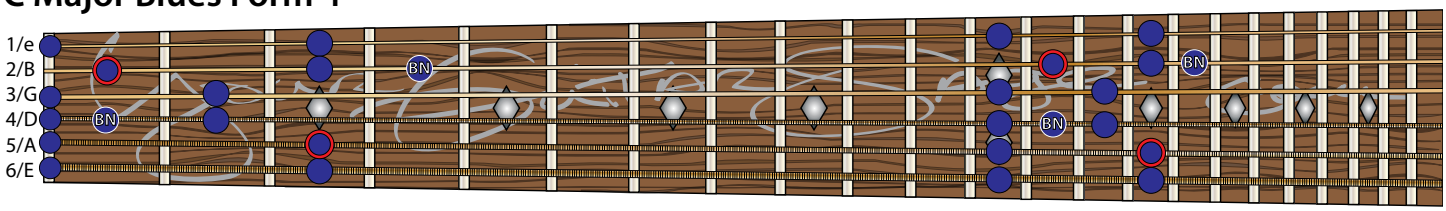

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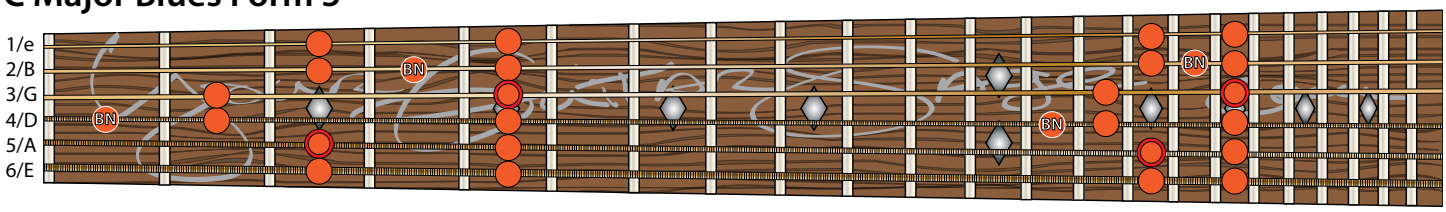

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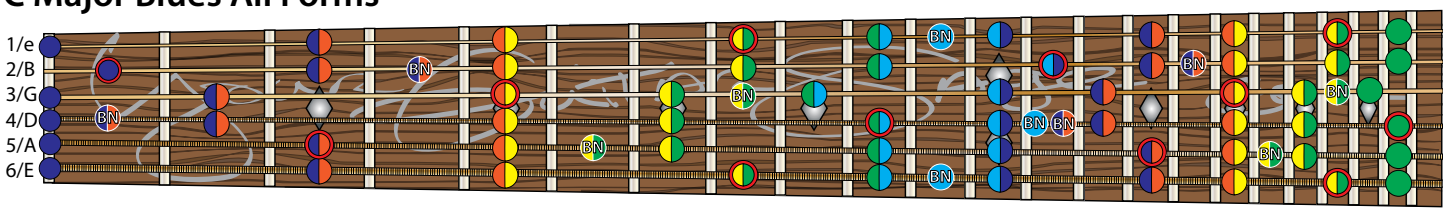

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